



Testimony of Merrill Gay
Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 27, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Merrill Gay. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success.

I am here to testify against HB6824 in regards to the budget for the Office of Early Childhood. While we are relieved that the proposed budget didn't cut preschool programs or the Care4kids childcare subsidy, we have two major concerns.

The first is the cut to the **Community Plans for Early Childhood** line item. As many of you remember, the Early Childhood Alliance championed the creation of the Office of Early Childhood. We did that not only out of frustration over the tangled mess of funding and regulatory requirements faced by early care providers, but also because we wanted to create a system that worked for families with young children. Those families live in 169 different towns, each with their own unique circumstances. It was always our vision that this new early childhood system would be more than the reorganizing of some functions in state government. We believe there needs to be a local component to this system to make sure that things are working on the ground. The local component that already exists and is working in 42 communities are the Local Early Childhood Councils. They have names that range from Danbury's Promise for Children to Children First New London but they share a common role and I know that you have testimony from many of them. The \$750,000 cut from the line item provides each of them with a grant of under \$20,000, which is matched by private philanthropy. The strategies and projects they have developed to carry out their local plans have leveraged millions more dollars to improve the lives of young children in their communities.

The other major shortcoming of this budget as it relates to early childhood is the fact that it does nothing to address the **looming crisis in the early childhood workforce**. By state law, every classroom in every state subsidized early childhood program must, by 2020, have a teacher with a BA in early childhood or related field. By this July, half of the teachers in those programs will have to meet that requirement and the other half must have an Associate's in early childhood. For

the past five years, childcare programs have been pushing their staff to go back to school to get the required degrees. Despite that, we are getting reports of early childhood programs that have been advertising in vain for months trying to find candidates with BA's. The problem is that they can't afford to pay a competitive wage. The reimbursement rates for School Readiness and the State Funded Child Development Centers need to be increased so that providers can pay their staff a living wage.

In addition I want to emphasize that the elimination of:

- Help Me Grow
- The Parent's Trust Fund (PLTI, Parent SEE)
- The Head Start Link
- The Early Literacy Grant
- School age care in state funded centers, and
- The Family School Partnership

would be a tremendous loss of support services for families.

Thank you for listening and I would be happy to answer any questions.